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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000759

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: VICTIMIZED BELARUSIAN STUDENTS GET CHANCE TO STUDY ABROAD

REF: A. MINSK 431

[1B.](#) MINSK 395

Classified By: AMBASSADOR GEORGE KROL FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

[¶11.](#) (C) Summary: Inna Kulei's Committee for the Defense of the Repressed (CDR) has successfully placed approximately 250 Belarusian students who have been victimized for their political activities in universities in neighboring countries. Discrepancies exist over precisely how many of these students have been officially expelled or have left their Belarusian university on their own accord. The remaining students who have approached the committee, however, all report increased pressure from university officials and fears of possible expulsion in the near future.

To Kulei's credit, the CDR has served as a vehicle through which rival opposition parties and several prominent NGOs effectively and creatively work together to address specific problems. End Summary.

30 vs. 300: Discrepancy over Number of Expelled Students

[¶12.](#) (C) Wife of former presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich Inna Kulei told Poloff on July 10 that more than 400 students have sought assistance in pursuing education opportunities outside of Belarus from her Committee for the Defense of the Repressed (ref A). She said that 70 percent of that number, or approximately 280 students, have been officially expelled from their universities. The remaining 30 percent face harassment and pressure from university authorities and fear expulsion in the near future.

[¶13.](#) (C) Other activists that work with Kulei on the CDR, however, report significantly lower numbers of officially expelled students after sources with contacts in the universities also strongly doubt that many students have been expelled. On July 12, Human Rights Alliance head Lyudmila Gryaznova told Poloff that only 30 students had been officially expelled from Belarusian universities since January 2006, not 280 as Inna Kulei reported. The rest of the students, according to Gryaznova, left their universities of their own accord or are experiencing increased pressure from the authorities. In addition on July 14, Association of Belarusian Students head Alyona Talapila estimated that no more than 100-200 students have been expelled.

Universities Apply Additional Forms of Pressure

[¶14.](#) (C) Reliable contacts consistently reported to Poloff that students are experiencing increased pressure and threats of expulsion from the authorities. Talapila said that

students are often called into university officials' offices to discuss their "activities and behavior." Gryaznova stated that students with good academic records were given failing grades on their final exams. If these students do not pass the exams when they retake them in the fall, they can be expelled. Gryaznova speculate that the GOB is waiting for the start of the next academic year when the enrollment process in the committee's study abroad programs is complete before beginning to expel the other students, thereby leaving them with few education opportunities. To hedge against this possibility, some foreign universities, like those in Ukraine, have promised to keep a "rolling admissions" policy for future expelled Belarusian students.

CDR Works with Local Parties and NGOs to Assist Students

¶15. (C) The CDR is the main organization in Belarus facilitating the education programs established by foreign governments and universities to help expelled and victimized Belarusian students. Kulei told Ambassador on July 14 that assisting these students is an inclusive endeavor, drawing on the talents and interests of rivaling opposition parties and most NGOs. The committee has developed productive relationships with the EU and Ukrainian embassies and their respective governments.

¶16. (C) The largest and most generous educational assistance program for these students is the Kastus Kalinowski program in Poland. According to Kulei, this program has provided opportunities for 250 Belarusian students to receive a free education with a stipend at Polish universities. Similar programs exist in Estonia, the Czech Republic, Latvia and Ukraine.

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¶17. (C) According to Gryaznova, who has served on the CDR's student application review panel, the CDR meets twice a week to interview and select students to attend the foreign university programs. In order to qualify for the program, a student must have been either expelled from their university, arrested and sentenced to prison, fined, have an open criminal case, or have a parent who has been fired or who has experienced one of the above repressions. Students who have only been briefly detained by the authorities do not qualify for this program.

Mixed Motives and Reactions from Students

¶18. (C) Gryaznova told Poloff most of the students are grateful for a free education with a stipend in a western country where they believe the quality of life and education to be higher. Gryaznova admitted, however, that there are some students who wish to remain in Belarus despite the persecution to continue their academic and opposition activities. Kulei told Ambassador that the CDR is working to support these students by helping them find places to live and study.

¶19. (C) Gryaznova added that, regrettably, approximately 10 percent of the arrested students participated in the demonstrations because they saw an easy opportunity to "earn" a free scholarship to study abroad or acquire political refugee status when abroad. Gryaznova knows that they abused the system and does not consider them to be "real human rights activists," but maintained that such students still qualify for the program.

Comment

¶10. (C) Aside from ostensibly "non-political" expulsions, the authorities continue to employ a variety of methods to punish students for expressing their inconformity with the regime.

Fortunately, under Kulei's leadership, Belarus' democratic forces have found a way to overcome their differences on this issue and develop creative ways to mitigate the effects of political repression.

Krol